Jessica Smith

Wiki Post #3

**Kaffir Boy**

Mark Mathabane

**Summary**: Mama is pregnant again and gives birth to a baby girl, Linah. The family is struggling with finances yet again and Papa is losing money from gambling. Mark and Papa argue over their finances and Mark is angry that Papa is wasting away his money when he needs to save up for the new baby. On a visit Mrs. Smith gives Mark an old tennis racquet. He begins practicing in Alexandra by himself, and dreams about what would happen if he could play tennis. One day, a man named Scaramouche, one of the best coloured tennis players in Johannesburg, watched Mark play. He decided then that he would be Mark’s coach. Still against his father’s wishes, Mark takes his Standard Six exams, with hopes that he does well enough to receive a scholarship for secondary school. He scores in the top six students and receives a First Class Pass. He is given a government scholarship that will pay for three years of schooling. He goes to the local secondary school and quickly becomes top of his class. He continues to practice tennis and soon becomes better than his coach. Mark starts working part-time for the Smith’s to pay for his uniform and he also becomes captain of the tennis team at his school.

Mark is introduced to a white tennis ranch by his friend Tom and he begins to attend. When Arthur Ashe comes to South Africa Mark is able to see him, which is important as he looks up to the tennis great. At the ranch he is able to see the other side of white people and begins to realize that not all are bad. Back at home, however, he is criticized for his interaction with the whites. His eyes begin to swell up due to a curse so he goes to see a diviner. The diviner tells him that his relatives are jealous and that his ancestors are trying to make him blind. Despite these claims by the witch doctor, Mark knows that mingling with the whites and doing his best in school will ultimately provide a better future for him and his family. He hopes that his involvement at the ranch will help him reach his dreams of coming to America.

In 1976 there are riots outside the school because it is declared that black schools are not allowed to teach in English. Mark comes to the realization that the revolution in South Africa will be one of violence, not peace. He is cut off from the ranch for a while, but is allowed to return after a few months when the schools reopen. Mark is invited to play in the Annual National Junior Tennis Championships and meets a young white man named Andre. Andre had been to the United States on a tennis scholarship, and he tells Mark all about life there. This fuels Mark’s determination to eventually make it to the U.S. Mark decides to enter the South African Breweries' Open, even though he is worried about the prejudice. While at the tournament he gets to know and talks to Stan Smith and his wife. Stan tells him that he will look into tennis scholarships when he gets back to the U.S., and Mark vows to keep working for interracial sports.

When Mark returns he gets his exam results back, but unfortunately he did not pass Tsonga so he isn’t able to attend even a black university. His colleagues tell him to find a job, but Mark is insistent on training for tennis so that he plays well enough to get scholarships. He feels that his only option is to be able to get to America. While he waits for news from America, Mark gets a job at Barclays Bank. He starts getting letters from many American universities, and receives one from Limestone college that offered him a full athletic scholarship. After gathering his passport and air fare, he is finally ready to leave South Africa. He says a tearful goodbye to his family, as he will not see them for at least four years, but as the taxi drives away he knows that he is ready for his future in America.

**Analysis**: This section of the book really shows Mark’s dedication to ridding South Africa of apartheid using the talents and opportunities that he was given. Gone is the young boy that was tempted by gang lifestyles. Instead, Mark focuses on providing for his family and making changes on the outlook of black athletes. He knows that achieving success on the court and in school will help him and his family in the future, so all of his time and energy is put towards practice and schoolwork. Ultimately, his drive and determination is what allows him to achieve his goal of going to America.

In addition, I think that America itself is a symbol of the “light” in Mark’s life. Tennis also symbolizes this light. In the beginning of the novel Mark is growing up in Alexandria, and all he ever sees is the police raids and “bad” white people. It is not until he is older that he meets whites who are nice and just like the black friends that he has. While he is still young, he has the vision that America will be a place of freedom for him, and that image stays with him as his goal for the future. His way to achieve that goal is to become a successful tennis player, so he sets his sights on being the best tennis player that he can be. Tennis becomes somewhat of an escape for Mark, out of the black world and out of the Alexandria lifestyle. He begins to experience what life might be like in America, so that becomes his ultimate goal. America becomes the light in the darkness of apartheid Alexandria.

**Application**: Mark’s determination is a human characteristic that spans time and culture. Even though some of his colleagues saw his association with whites as a way to better his own life, Mark was always determined to use his influence in white tennis leagues as a way to incorporate interracial sports. He was always determined to better life for his family and all blacks in South Africa that were suffering from apartheid. It is not always easy to remain so driven in tough situations, but like many others in his position, Mark perseveres and is able to achieve success. Another characteristic is Mark’s pursuit of perfection. Although finishing top in his class and having a high paying bank job is more than he could have ever dreamed of when he was young, he keeps working until he is able to go to America. He does not stop until he finally reaches that goal. To him, being able to attend college and play tennis in America is the ideal future, so he works hard in Alexandria for years until he has the opportunity to travel to the states.